Beauty will rise

They say there are two kinds of people—those who are bested by a bad situation, and those who make the best of a bad situation. Falling into the later category is Adventist Bruno Amah, who remains in a West African prison after a legally dubious sentence to life imprisonment for conspiracy to commit murder.

It’s a situation that would cause many people to give up. However, instead of losing hope, Mr Amah is sharing the ultimate Hope with his fellow prisoners. A recent evangelistic campaign he hosted resulted in 30 inmates committing their lives to Christ through baptism. A further 120 inmates also took part in a communion service held on the final Sabbath of the program.

Mr Amah is a living testament of the mercy and power of God to turn something broken into something beautiful. May we continue to pray for him and all our brothers and sisters who are struggling through difficult times. After all, “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18 NIV).

We hope you will catch a few more glimpses of God’s beauty as you keep reading this week’s edition of Record eNews.
Adventists planting churches at record rate

Seventh-day Adventist churches are springing up around the world at the fastest rate in the denomination’s 152-year history, with a new building opening its doors to worshippers every 3.58 hours.

Centres of influence

Having more churches is great, but it means little if they’re not having a lasting impact on the community. Think about this—if your church was shut down, displaced or destroyed, would it be missed by the people around it?

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
• Aussies and Kiwis call for increases in foreign aid
• More than 300 Christians captured by ISIS in Syria
• South Pacific church leaders concerned by pornography statistics

Religious freedom specialist James Standish explains why what is happening to Christians in the Middle East, courtesy of the “Islamic State”, is accurately described as
**Getting to know Melissa Otto**

Melissa Otto says her songs are like a diary, tracking the ups and downs of her personal and spiritual journey. But one theme keeps shining through: the love of God.

**Ice core science**

As debate over climate change brews, teams of scientists are working to recreate a history of our earth’s climate. But does the evidence they’re finding disprove the biblical account of earth’s history?

**Three little tweaks**

Kent Kingston says he resonates deeply with Protestantism, especially as set out in Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy*. "But because of the Protestant history we’ve inherited, there are some things we can improve . . .”
30 Togo inmates baptised at new prison chapel

Photo Source: Eastern Sahel Union Mission | "Church and prison leaders open the new chapel."

Lomé, Togo

Thirty inmates were baptised at a Togo prison chapel built by the Seventh-day Adventist Church after prison officials asked for help replacing a previous chapel that collapsed in bad weather.

The inmates took their stand for Jesus during a special dedication ceremony at the main prison in Lomé, the bustling capital of the sub-Saharan African country, church leaders said Friday.

The chapel, which contains an outdoor baptistery, benches for 100 people, and electricity to run lights, fans, and a sound system, was financed with a $US6000 donation from the General Conference, the administrative body of the Adventist Church.

General Conference president Dr Ted Wilson approved the expenditure from a special presidential discretionary fund after being contacted by the Adventist Church’s Togo-based Eastern Sahel Union Mission.

“Thirty souls sealed their covenant with the Lord through baptism in the new baptistery built with your donation,” Sélom Kwasi Sessou, executive secretary of the Adventist Church’s Togo-based Eastern Sahel Union Mission, wrote in a letter to Dr Wilson.

A male inmate accepting Jesus at the chapel.

The baptisms, conducted last Sabbath, February 21, were the result of an evangelistic series led by Bruno Amah, an Adventist member jailed in the prison, together with the Togo church’s Chaplaincy Ministries department, said Sessou, who headed a church delegation at the dedication ceremony.

In addition, 120 inmates took part in a communion service during the ceremony.
The prison director thanked Sessou and the Adventist Church for the funds for the chapel, and he promised to pray for God’s blessings on the church.

“He promised that the room will be multifunctional and be put to good use,” Sessou said. “He said they will ask the Almighty God to continue to keep a benevolent eye on the Adventist Church and that He opens more doors for possible blessings.”

_Inmates washing each other's feet during the Communion service._

A plaque on the front of the chapel bears the Adventist Church logo and recognises the role of the church and Dr Wilson in the construction of the building.

Dr Wilson expressed gratitude to God for the 30 baptisms and to asked that church members around the world remember Bruno Amah and all Adventist prisoners in prayer.

“Praise God for His leading in this prison outreach,” Dr Wilson said.
Adventists planting churches at record rate

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Seventh-day Adventist churches are springing up around the world at the fastest rate in the denomination’s 152-year history, with a new building opening its doors to worshippers every 3.58 hours, according to newly released figures.

A record 2446 new churches opened last year, helping fuel the largest single-year increase in membership and bringing total membership to nearly 18.5 million, according to the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

Pastor Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission, whose missionaries play a key role in opening new churches, praised God for the impressive growth figures and called for the Adventist Church to push ahead boldly in its Revelation 14-inspired mission to proclaim Jesus’ soon coming.

“These statistics suggest that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is heading in the right direction in its mission and must keep that focus,” Pastor Krause said Monday.

“Countless studies show that church planting is the most effective form of sustained church growth—confirming the testimony of the book of Acts, the counsel of Ellen White, and the Adventist Church’s own history,” he said.

Ellen White, a co-founder of the Adventist Church, encouraged church planting as a means to spur church growth during her lifetime, and she repeatedly pointed to the example of the early Christian church in Acts as a model to emulate.

The ratio of one new Adventist church opening every 3.58 hours last year compares with one church opening every 4.25 hours in 2013 and the previous record of 3.71 hours in 2005.

A main way that the Adventist Church has sought to foster the growth of new churches is through the General Conference’s Office of Adventist Mission, which oversees six Global Mission centers and a Global Mission Pioneer movement with a mandate to start new groups of believers in new geographical areas and among new people groups.
Counting new churches

The total of 2446 new churches that opened last year is 381 higher than 2013 and tops the previous record of 2416 churches in 2002, said Dr David Trim, director of the Adventist Church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

The Adventist Church ended 2014—the 10th consecutive year in which more than 2000 churches were organised—with a total of 78,810 churches, compared with 57,850 a decade earlier in 2004, 38,779 churches in 1994, and 7,818 churches in 1934.

“The increase last year in local churches is the most new local churches ever organised in any calendar year,” Dr Trim said. “This is partly a fruit of the church planting organised by the Office of Adventist Mission and involving Global Mission pioneers—generally unsung heroes.”

Dr Trim said the growth in churches was, from all evidence, an important but often overlooked part of the explanation for the growth in overall church membership.

Adventist Mission director Pastor Gary Krause underscoring the importance of church planting at the Annual Council in October 2014. [Photo courtesy: ANN]

Nearly 18.5 million Adventists

Newly compiled figures from his office indicate that a record 1,167,796 people joined the Adventist Church last year, surpassing the 1,091,222 people who joined in 2013 and the previous record of 1,139,000 in 2011.

That means 3197 new members joined the church every day, or 133 every hour, and 2.22 every minute, giving the denomination a total membership of 18,479,257 at the end of 2014, according to a fact sheet called ‘Interesting Facts and Figures’ from Trim’s office.

Today, one out of every 392 people in the global population of 7.238 billion is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, an uptick from one in 393 people in 2013 and one in 459 people a decade earlier in 2004.

The 2014 growth rate of 1.85 percent exceeded the 2013 rate of 1.47 percent but fell from 2.3 percent in 2012 and a decade high of 4.98 percent in 2006.

Some local church members have ambitious goals for opening new churches. Church leaders in the Dominican Republic, for example, are seeking to open at least 25 churches per year, said Libna Stevens, assistant communication director for the Inter-American Division.

Pastor Krause, whose Office of Adventist Mission traces its roots to the 1990 General Conference session in Indianapolis, urged church members to actively engage in church planting, noting that the Adventist Church began as a church-planting movement and has only continued to grow as it has focused on starting new groups of believers.

Church members can support church planting financially at <AdventistMission.org>.

“Where opportunities open up and if God calls you, get personally involved in starting new groups of believers,”
Krause said.

“At the least, pray for and encourage those who are involved in planting new churches,” he said. “If people in the church you attend feel called to start a new congregation, support them. They’re not deserting the ship—they’re going as missionaries. God will bless mother churches for sending them.”
It's often said the best way to measure the effectiveness of a church is to have it removed from the local community. Think seriously about that for a moment—if your church was shut down, displaced or destroyed, would it be missed by the people around it?

If the answer is “No” then—sorry—your church is dead, or at the very most on life support. “But our worship services on Sabbath morning are so alive,” you might say. Terrific. But is a church really “alive” if it's only making some literal noise in the community for one hour in a 168-hour week?

“It is through social relations that Christianity comes in contact with the world,” said Ellen White (The Adventist Home, p 428). “Over and over again the light has been given me that we should establish in all our cities small plants which shall be centres of influence.” (Testimonies for the Church, Vol 7, p 115)

It’s something the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) New Zealand is looking to address through its Church Partnership Program. Launched in September last year, the initiative hopes to transform churches across the country into “My Family Centres” that will provide resources and support for families in the community.

“Together, ADRA New Zealand and the North and South NZ Conferences have a vision of being a Church recognised for loving its community and providing programs that strengthen families,” said ADRA New Zealand CEO Matthew Siliga.

“The strength of our Church is that we are in 120 sites across the country, in every major suburb in each city and every other town,” he said. “Sharing our skills, interests, passions and faith has the potential to change the face of the communities we love so much.”

ADRA New Zealand volunteers collect clothing for the Welcome Baby initiative.

That potential is already being realised. Nearly 30 new community programs have already been established, with churches providing local residents with job skills training (called “Pathways”), family budgeting (“My Money”) and parenting assistance (“Toolbox”).
Another program proving to be a hit is the “Welcome Baby” initiative, which endeavours to provide young mothers and vulnerable families with clothes for their newborns and infants (up to 12 months old).

Churches participating in the program receive 40 packs of new clothes and nappies to serve as the basis of their “clothing library”. Each pack is valued at $NZ250, which mothers can exchange for another pack as their baby grows.

While the distribution of clothes is the core activity of this program, Welcome Baby also allows churches to build relationships and support mothers at an important stage of their lives.

“Being a mum, especially for the first time, can be very stressful and scary,” said Ina Louw, Welcome Baby coordinator for Papatoetoe church. “I’m glad I can share some of my experiences and what I’ve learned over the years with these young mothers.”

ADRA New Zealand’s Church Partnership Program is precisely what it describes—a partnership. The North and South NZ Conferences have thrown their full support behind the initiative, with other not-for-profit organisations such as Parenting Place also getting involved.

“Through the Church Partnership Program we can be the presence of Jesus in our communities,” said North NZ Conference lead pastor Eddie Tupa’i. “Together we can actively transform life in New Zealand in the image of, and for the glory of, God.”

South NZ Conference president Pastor Damien Rice said in order for churches to be truly “missional” they need to step out into their communities.

“[It’s about] you and I taking the gospel out of the church service and into our lives—our homes, neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces and social clubs,” he said. “Being missional means more than just personal responsibility. It means personal action.”

For details on how your church can get involved, please go to <www.adra.org.nz/national-projects-2>.
As debate over climate change brews, teams of scientists are working to recreate a history of our earth’s climate. But does the history they are finding disprove the biblical account of earth’s history?

A key tool in this quest is the history frozen within the ice sheets that cover Greenland and Antarctica. By using a hollow drill scientists are able to drill down and extract long, thin cylinders of ice, called “ice cores”.1 The cores are made up of layers of ice, appearing something like a translucent tube of Life Savers. Scientists observe that the top layers are formed by annual snowfall. If ancient layers of ice were similarly formed by annual snowfalls and if the chemical composition, levels of pollutants and concentrations of pollens and dust within each layer were a result of the climate at that time, ice cores provide key data to recreating the earth’s climate history over a large expanse of time.

One ice core illustrates the process. On July 1, 1993 a team of scientists finished drilling and extracting the GISP2 ice core near the centre of Greenland. The entire ice core is 3km long and weighs about 40 tonnes. But how many years does it represent, what does it say about our climate history and what does that history say about the veracity of the biblical account of creation?

It’s not always easy to count the number of layers in an ice core precisely. Scientists use different measurement techniques to compare the results, but these measurements don’t always fully agree and some of the measurement techniques can’t be used further down the core.2 Also, layers become very thin deeper in the ice—to the point where scientists can’t visually distinguish any layers at all so they employ an indirect way of counting the layers.3 After checking and adjusting their results, as well as having some friendly arguments along the way, the team of scientists finally arrived at the conclusion that the GISP2 ice core had about 110,000 layers. The scientists then made a critical decision on how to interpret the layers—they assumed all the layers represented individual years. Thus the scientists interpreted their counting of layers in the GISP2 ice core to represent 110,000 years.

Some have pointed to the ice core dating as evidence that the biblical record is inaccurate. Careful analysis of these scientific studies, however, reveals the apparent challenge is not as conclusive as it is often claimed to be. This is for three reasons.

Firstly, the work of counting the layers is not a straightforward, precise process. It's more of an art than a science, and that art is strongly impacted by the assumptions and scientific models of those doing the counting.
Secondly, scientists make the assumption that each single layer represents one year in the history of the ice core. Consequently, the scientific conclusion that the GISP2 ice core represents 110,000 years of climate history, for example, hinges on whether this assumption is true. The scientists themselves acknowledge that it's possible for weather conditions like storms to produce multiple layers of ice in any one particular year. These layers are usually thinner and closely packed together, like the layers that are found at the bottom of the ice core. The impact of forming ice during periods when the earth’s weather varied substantially is not possible to calculate without an independent, detailed record of that variability. This means that the current scientific estimate for the age of the ice core potentially varies dramatically from its actual age.

Third, there is another explanation for layers in the ice cores. The global Flood recorded in Genesis caused extreme and wildly erratic weather conditions. It likely would have been followed by an Ice Age when the massive ice sheets were formed in Greenland and Antarctica. In a short period of time this post-Flood Ice Age would have caused large amounts of snowfall and many layers of ice to be formed through the storms that occurred during this time. This would mean that the series of layers in the ice core could be formed in only a few thousand years.

We have two explanations for the age of the ice cores. The really important question is: which one of them provides the closest estimate for the true age of the cores? The reality is that scientists do not know for certain that their interpretation of the data collected from the ice cores is accurate. As Professor Richard Alley states, “All scientific ideas are subject to revision; we should never be absolutely sure that the truth has been reached.” The reason for this is because scientific conclusions are based on unverifiable assumptions, reductionist models and equivocal data. To paraphrase a wise person, there are assumptions that seem right to a modern scientist but they lead to false conclusions.

So where can we find the truth regarding the history of the earth? We must examine multiple sources of data. One source is ice cores but we can only verify scientific interpretations of the ice core evidence if we have historical records that we can reconcile these interpretations with. Do we have such a historical record that has proven itself to be accurate? The historic source for ancient history that has been demonstrated to be accurate is, of course, the Bible. Despite significant efforts to discredit it, the validity of the historical accounts in the Bible has proven to be reliable time and time again. And part of that account is the Flood record, key elements of which have been corroborated in the written and oral traditions of multiple cultures around the globe, such as characters in the Chinese language. Scientific interpretations of ice core data that have not been reconciled with the implications of such a global flood on weather patterns and ice formations are potentially wildly off the mark.

Ice cores are a fascinating area of study. The data extracted—particularly of relatively recent periods when we have collaborating historic evidence to verify weather conditions and exceptional weather events—is valuable in studying recent climate variations. The science around ice cores becomes much more speculative, however, when we extrapolate data into periods during which far less is known about the earth’s condition and when we exclude from our analysis data from the biblical record.


2. The scientific process of comparing different parameters to date the GISP2 ice core is described in the paper Meese, D. et al. “The Greenland Ice Sheet Project 2 Depth-age Scale: Methods and Results” Journal of Geophysical Research, 102 (C12) 26,411-26,423 (1997). Available at: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/97JC00269/pdf](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/97JC00269/pdf). Historical records of volcanic eruptions were used to reconcile the dating of the ice core but these records only go back 2000 years. Beyond this point, it is also important to note that even if all of the parameters totally agreed, this does not mean that the scientific estimates of the number of layers are accurate. Professor Richard Alley has noted “Agreement [between these parameters] does not prove accuracy, however; perhaps all of us were being fooled in the same way.” Alley, R. *The Two-Mile Time Machine*, p 57. He is referring to the reality that we could all be fooled by
the scientific assumptions and models being used to interpret the data.

3. This measurement technique is called laser-light scattering from dust (LLS). However, it is important to note the following comments about the LLS method: “LLS was a very valuable dating tool throughout almost the entire length of the core, particularly in the deeper ice at GISP2, where the other techniques either fail or become increasingly unreliable. However, an increased particular concentration may not be restricted to the spring or summer and additional influxes of dust may occur during any part of the year, creating additional peaks of a nonannual nature.” Meese, D. et al. “The Greenland Ice Sheet Project 2 Depth-age Scale: Methods and Results”, Journal of Geophysical Research, 102 (C12) 26,411-26,423 (1997).

4. The fundamental issue with this assumption is known as the problem of induction. The problem can be illustrated with the following logic: “All swans we have seen are white, and therefore all swans are white.” Anyone from Australia knows that this reasoning is prematurely reductionistic! In the same way, while layers of ice at the top of an ice core can correspond to individual years, it does not follow that all of the layers represent individual years. The problem of induction calls into question all scientific claims based on finite evidence sets.

5. As Professor Richard Alley has noted: “Fundamentally, in counting any annual marker, we must ask whether it is absolutely unequivocal, or whether nonannual events could mimic or obscure a year. For the visible strata (and, we believe, for any other annual indicator at accumulation rates representative of central Greenland), it is almost certain that variability exists at the subseasonal or storm level, at the annual level, and for various longer periodicities (two-year, sunspot, etc.). We certainly must entertain the possibility of misidentifying the deposit of a large storm or a snow dune as an entire year or missing a weak indication of a summer and thus picking a two-year interval as 1 year.” R.B. Alley, et al. “Visual-stratigraphic dating of the GISP2 ice core: Basis, reproducibility, and application”, Journal of Geophysical Research, 102 (C12) 26,378, (1997). Available at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/96JC03837/pdf.

6. “[I]t is possible to have depositional depth-hoar layers form at any time of the year. These typically are thinner and of higher density than the summertime diagenetic depth-hoar layers and so can be distinguished readily in snow pits, but they could complicate observations at greater depths in the core.” R.B. Alley, et al. “Visual-stratigraphic dating of the GISP2 ice core: Basis, reproducibility, and application”, Journal of Geophysical Research, 102 (C12) 26,377-26,378, (1997).

7. For a brief introduction into the concept of the post-Flood Ice Age, refer to the Geoscience Research Institute FAQ regarding the Ice Age: http://grisda.org/resources/faq/ice-age/. A more detailed description of the post-Flood Ice Age and an ice core dating model that incorporates the biblical creation and flood accounts is provided in the chapters “The Genesis Flood Caused the Ice Age” and “Do Ice Cores Show Many Tens of Thousands of Years?” in Michael Oard’s book Frozen in Time. Master Books, 2004. Available at: https://answeringgenesis.org/answers/books/frozen-in-time/. Note that the GISP2 project team used historical records of volcanic eruptions to reconcile segments of their ice core dating model with the top layers of the ice core, so it is scientifically legitimate for Seventh-day Adventists to use the historical record of the Flood to reconcile the model with the layers in the deeper segments of the core.

8. More recently, ice cores from Antarctica have been interpreted to be 420,000 years old (the Vostok ice core) and 740,000 years old (the EPICA Dome C ice core): Petit, J. et al. “Climate and atmospheric history of the past 420,000 years from the Vostok ice core, Antarctica”, Nature 399, 429-439 (1999) Abstract available at: http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v399/n6735/abs/399429a0.html. Augustin, L. et al. “Eight glacial cycles from an Antarctic ice core”, Nature 429, 623-628 (2004). Available at: http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v429/n6992/full/nature02599.html. These figures have not been produced by counting the number of annual layers, since the annual snow accumulation rate is much lower in Antarctica and so annual layers are not preserved reliably. Instead, major fluctuations or cycles in measurements from the ice cores have been observed and these have been matched with cycles in deep sea sediment cores, which have been interpreted to occur with a periodicity of 100,000 years. The 100,000 year period is based on the astronomical theory known as the Milankovitch theory. Since there were approximately four cycles in the Vostok measurements and eight cycles in the EPICA measurements, the ages of the ice cores were interpreted to
be 420,000 years and 740,000 years respectively. However, there are significant problems with the Milankovitch theory. The most relevant problem is that the orbital forcing on the earth’s climate for the 100,000 year period is small, even though this is the dominant periodicity in both the deep sea sediment cores and the ice cores. This is known as the 100,000-year problem. As the English astronomer Fred Hoyle has commented, “If I were to assert that a glacial condition could be induced in a room liberally supplied during winter with charged night-storage heaters simply by taking an ice cube into the room, the proposition would be no more unlikely than the Milankovitch theory.” Hoyle, F. *Ice, the Ultimate Human Catastrophe*, Continuum, New York, 1981, p 77. This suggests that orbital forcing at the 100,000 year period is not the primary causal mechanism for the cycles in ice core measurements and that other causal mechanisms need to be explored. One viable candidate is rapid post-Flood climate variations, which would mean a much younger age for both the deep sea sediment cores and the Vostok and EPICA ice cores.


10. Proverbs 14:12; 16:25 (ESV). This observation has been confirmed in the inspired counsel that has been given to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the chapter “The Literal Week”, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p 111-116: Available at: [http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp9.html](http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp9.html)

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*Dr Sven Ostring is director of Personal Ministries, Sabbath School, Stewardship and Discipleship for the Greater Sydney Conference.*
I resonate deeply with Protestantism, especially as set out in Ellen White’s, The Great Controversy. Saved by faith; the Bible only; freedom of conscience and belief—these themes are fundamental to Adventist identity. But because of the Protestant history we’ve inherited, there are some things we can improve.

1. **The sermon:** Typically, an Adventist worship service is divided into the preliminaries and the preaching. The word “preliminaries” suggests that all other aspects of a worship service—prayer, music, testimony, offering—are a support act to the sermon.

   While this is expressive of our “Word”-oriented Protestant tradition, it is an unhelpful emphasis for those who struggle to connect with God and His truth by listening to a long speech. Any good teacher will tell you a variety of teaching methods is required to engage the whole class.

   “When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation . . . so that the church may be built up” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

   The apostle Paul doesn’t privilege one part of the worship service above the rest. Neither does he expect the congregation to merely listen passively—his worship model is for “each of you” to participate. There is a place for sermons in this model but other worship activities are not relegated to “preliminary” status.

2. **Bible study:** Protestantism’s emphasis on sola scriptura (the Bible only) and freedom of conscience has led us to value individual Bible study. We admire those who spend hours chasing cross-references and consulting concordances. But what about the vast bulk of us who struggle with reading complex material? It’s not only the world’s illiterate millions who fall into this category; it’s also the post-literate millions—the screen-fixated multimedia natives.

   Protestantism flourished in the age of the printing press—Bibles for everyone! But New Testament congregations had to share hand-copied Scriptures. And not everyone could read. So public reading, group discussion and memorisation were the main ways of engaging with the Bible.
Could it be that reclaiming these ways of interacting with Scripture would strengthen our spiritual community? Could group Bible study be as useful as individual study? Could reading aloud to each other be more effective at reaching the digital generation? The Word of God must remain at our centre, but the precise way we engage with it may need to change.

3. The opposition: An unfortunate feature of the Protestant mindset can be the instinct to react against anything that looks or feels Roman Catholic. Want to involve candles in worship? We resist because it smacks of Catholicism. Considering celibacy? Some find this uncomfortable, equating celibacy with monasticism. Confessing sins to each other? Some Protestants instinctively visualise a Catholic confession box. And yet each of these behaviours has clear biblical precedents.

It’s difficult to read the Bible with an open heart when we’re constantly looking over our shoulder to check that we haven’t accidentally agreed with the opposition.

If we’re serious about sola scriptura, we have to keep moving in the direction of the Word of God. Sometimes that means challenging our traditions and our culture.

Kent Kingston is assistant editor of Adventist Record.